

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please replace claims 15, 17, 20, and 21 with the following rewritten versions:

a² 15. (Amended) The process of claim 12, wherein the printing device comprises an impact printing device which intimately contacts the earplug surface during said printing.

a³ 17. (Amended) The process of claim 13, wherein the ink jet printing device forms a dot matrix pattern.

a⁴ 20. (Amended) The process of claim 12, wherein the printing device comprises a plurality of printing devices orientated relative to one another so that a plurality of patterns are formed on the earplug.

21. (Amended) The process of claim 20, wherein the plurality of printing devices are orientated one of 120°, 180°, and 90° relative to one another.

✓ Please insert the following newly added claims:

a⁵ 27. (Newly Added) A process for forming a pattern on an earplug, comprising:
providing the earplug;
transferring the earplug to a printing device;

orienting the earplug, with an orientation mechanism, relative to the printing device;

communicating the pattern from a storage device to the printing device, said communicating being performed by a controller;

printing the pattern, with the printing device, on an outer surface of the earplug; and

conveying the earplug away from the printing device.

28. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, further comprising orienting the printing device, with the controller, relative the earplug.

29. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, wherein the storage device comprises a microprocessor and wherein said communicating comprises the microprocessor transmitting a signal corresponding to the pattern to the controller and the controller controlling the printing device so as to produce the pattern.

30. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing comprises:

supplying ink under pressure to a nozzle;

ejecting the ink from the nozzle in the form of ink droplets; and

deflecting the ink droplets onto the outer surface of the earplug.

31. (Newly Added) The process of claim 30, wherein said ejecting comprises vibrating the nozzle to form the ink droplets.

32. (Newly Added) The process of claim 30, wherein said deflecting comprises transmitting the ink droplets past a charge electrode, applying an electric charge to the droplets at the charge electrode, and transmitting the ink droplets through an electric field formed by deflecting electrodes, the ink droplets deflecting in the electric field based upon the electric charge.

33. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing comprises an impact printing of the pattern on the outer surface of the earplug.

34. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing comprises a non-impact printing of the pattern on the outer surface of the earplug.

35. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, wherein the outer surface of the earplug comprises a side portion and an end portion, the end portion being formed substantially perpendicular to the side portion, said printing comprising applying the pattern to the side portion of the outer surface or to the end portion of the outer surface.

36. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, wherein said printing the pattern comprises forming a text letter, a number, or a graphical design on the outer surface.

37. (Newly Added) The process of claim 27, wherein the printing device comprises a plurality of individual printing devices each for printing the pattern at a different location on the outer surface of the earplug.

38. (Newly Added) A process for forming a pattern on an outer surface of an earplug, the outer surface including two opposing end surfaces and a side surface extending therebetween, comprising:

printing a first pattern on the side surface; and

printing a second pattern on one of the opposing end surfaces.

39. (Newly Added) The process of claim 38, wherein said printing the first pattern comprises a first printing device applying the pattern to the side surface and wherein said printing the second pattern comprises a second printing device applying the second pattern to the end surface.
